

North Chicago, IL – During a ceremony held Saturday in North Chicago, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk joined Navy veterans to break ground on a memorial dedicated to African-American who served in World War II.

The monument also marks a historic moment in naval history.

In March 1944, the U.S. Navy commissioned its first 13 African-American officers. The twelve commissioned officers, and a warrant officer who received his rank at the same time, became known as the “Golden Thirteen”.

“This monument will recognize the contribution of all members of the Greatest Generation but is unique as the first in the U.S. to be built by African-American World War II navy veterans,” said Congressman Kirk addressing an audience of community leaders and World War II veterans. “It is also important that this memorial be built in North Chicago.

It will be one of the first things that young Americans who join the United States Navy will see before training at Great Lakes Naval Training Center and joining the fleet.”

Congressman Kirk secured a \$97,000 federal appropriation to erect the memorial in North Chicago’s Veterans Memorial Park. Joining Kirk at the ceremony was Susan Sublett, wife of Frank Sublett – the last surviving member of the “Golden Thirteen” and Elaine Lewis, daughter of Graham Martin, a “Golden Thirteen” member who recently passed away. North Chicago Mayor Leon Rockingham, Ted Hudson, President, Chicago Chapter WWII Black Naval Veterans of Great Lakes, Command Master Chief April D. Beldo, Recruit Training Command, Naval Station Great Lakes, Leslie Day, Principal, Sutter Day Architects and Dale Villiard, President, Vanderwerff Construction also participated in the historic groundbreaking.

“Members of the Golden Thirteen became naval leaders long before President Truman desegregated the military,” said Congressman Kirk. “At the time, they were offered no

graduation and little thanks for their service to the nation. Frank Sublett and Graham Martin paved the way for military leaders like General Colin Powell who later commanded the entire U.S. armed forces. “This memorial is a formal thank you to so many aging African-Americans for volunteering to save America from the Nazis and Japanese Empire.”

The memorial, designed by Sutter Day Architects, is scheduled for completion by Labor Day. Although the monument honors all World War II veterans, it will have special plaques marking the service of the “Golden Thirteen” and other prominent African-American military heroes. North Chicago Veterans Memorial Park is dedicated to all who served during World War II.

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